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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003878

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SUBJECT: UNAMA: POSSIBLY POSTPONING ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDDEA Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Addressing ambassadors gathered at UNAMA on December 2, SRSG Kai Eide reported that he had held a "very productive" meeting with President Karzai on November 30, and that Karzai was clearly open to postponing district elections, but would need additional persuasion to postpone parliamentary elections, for which Karzai mentioned a May 20 date. Most ambassadors seemed to accept the wisdom of postponing both elections, as Eide favored, but several dissented (Turkey and EC). Eide urged ambassadors to raise privately with their contacts the need to postpone, and several agreed to do so. The British Deputy Head of Mission (DHM) also provided an update on the agenda for the January 28 London conference. Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs (CDDEA), Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne provided additional background on President Obama's December 1 speech and on the President's recent conversation with Karzai on the way forward in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Parliamentary and District Elections

¶2. (C) SRSG Eide shared with assembled ambassadors on December 2 that President Karzai had looked surprised when Eide conveyed to him in their November 30 meeting that, if the Parliamentary and District elections were to take place as scheduled in the spring of 2010, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) would have to make the announcement by the end of December or early January. Karzai said he had identified May 20 for parliamentary elections and conceded that district elections should be postponed. But Karzai said parliamentary elections should proceed and he favors 6900 polling stations. Eide said he explained the need for major reforms of the Election Commission and other challenges, and that Karzai did not agree but gave Eide a sense that he might consider a postponement of parliamentary elections.

¶3. (C) Eide stated that he intended to seriously push the issue with Karzai and hopefully secure his agreement to postpone the elections. However, Eide acknowledged that the IEC commissioners, whose mandate extends another year, were opposed to postponing the election. A confrontation is imminent, Eide warned, because UNDP-Elect will not work under the same conditions as it did in 2009, and the international community will not fund an election if they believe the process is still flawed.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Wayne seconded Eide's position on postponing the parliamentary elections, arguing that the international community should make plain to Afghan contacts the adverse impact another fraudulent election would have on international involvement in Afghanistan. Further, we should also obtain an accurate Afghan perspective on whether Afghans believe it would be more destructive to hold a fraudulent election than none at all. The British DHM argued that

holding elections in 2010 would distract from a critical time in our military operation here, just as it had in 2009, and that ISAF could not afford to be sidetracked by an election and the security requirements they would entail. He said President Obama's eighteen month time frame made it all the more important to stay focused on progress on security, governance, and development. Can we really afford five months of such a distraction and possible controversies over fraud, he asked. Ambassador Wayne said that "quiet conversations" with key Afghan contacts should be our strategy to winning support for a postponement, and Eide encouraged the ambassadors to raise the issue with key Afghan ministers and other influential contacts.

15. (C) Both the Turkish ambassador and the European Commission's representative dissented, however, asserting that "fraud is not unavoidable" and that the election should be held in order to give the Afghans the opportunity to fix their system and to begin making the necessary improvements to avoid fraud. The EC representative asserted that the elections should not be postponed just because the international community does not want to hold them. His views were also shared by the EUSR representative, who referenced a recent AREU report on Afghan views of the 2009 election, which she said showed considerable enthusiasm for the parliamentary elections on the part of the Afghan people. The German ambassador said that Abdullah Abdullah was very critical of the election process and was doubtful of IEC reform, but that Abdullah had expressed no clear opinion on the subject of postponement at a recent meeting.

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President Obama's Speech

16. (C) Amplifying the message that President Obama made in his December 1 speech, Ambassador Wayne stressed the need for increased international cooperation from our ISAF partners on military and, from all our partners, on civilian efforts in Afghanistan. He particularly highlighted how the new strategy would amplify America's civilian efforts, with a particular focus on economic growth, improving governance, and strengthening the central government's ability to deliver services on the district and local levels. These topics, as well as corruption and regional issues, were raised in President Obama's November 30 video conference with Karzai. President Obama had stressed to Karzai, as well as in his speech, that the U.S. is not making an open-ended commitment to Afghanistan, but will continue to evaluate our involvement, monitoring progress toward our shared objectives.

17. (C) Eide reported that the new U.S. focus on institution building and economic development appears to be gaining traction with President Karzai, who raised the issue with him in their recent meeting. Eide said that Karzai had never discussed institution building or sectors such as energy and mining with him before, nor had he previously acknowledged the need for improvements in the civil service and functioning of government ministries. Noting the new focus on strengthening the ministries, the Norwegian ambassador asked how donor funds would be distributed, and whether the central government would receive the funds or if they would be distributed locally. The Pakistani Deputy Chief of Mission raised the need to enhance the Afghan government's revenue collecting abilities. Wayne described our new strategy, which will work at the national and subnational level. For example, we will certify the ability of ministries to account for funding if we fund them directly, and our pilot program with the Independent Directorate of Local Governance to create funding mechanisms to directly funnel money to sub-national programs in six pilot districts. Improving capacity of local and provincial governments, Wayne said, will be critical in order to ensure funding is appropriately used.

London Conference

18. (C) The British DHM offered a brief update on the January 27 London conference, saying that invitations would go out shortly to all ISAF countries, regional powers, and other influential organizations. The focus remains on security, Transfer of Lead Security Responsibility (TLSR), and reintegration. A conference sequencing memo has been circulated to all relevant parties. The UK favors a JCMB meeting in Kabul in January, the London Conference, and finally a Kabul conference in late March or early April. Speaking privately to Ambassador Wayne, The British DHM noted that a draft concluding document for release at the London conference is already being drafted in London. Ambassador Wayne argued that Afghan input on this paper was essential. The British DHM said they were trying to connect with Foreign Minister Spanta and other ministers to do just that on TLSR, and the UK military representative at the meeting flagged to Ambassador Wayne the danger of sending a wrong message at London and the importance of not giving partners an easy excuse to withdraw troops before the time is right.

19. (C) Eide noted privately to Ambassador Wayne that he will probably be going to New York to address the UN Security Council on January 6, and could travel to Washington for meetings in conjunction with that trip.
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